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CERTAIN SYMBOLS IN *THE RIME OF THE  
ANCIENT MARINER*

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Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired *The Ancient Mariner* very much, but that there were two faults in it,—it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of moral, I told her that in my own judgement the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief, fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights'* tale of the merchant sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, *because* one of the date-shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son.

Thus Coleridge, according to his nephew, Henry Nelson Coleridge, answered the lady whose own literary style and "propriety of mind" had actually attracted him as late as 1797, although after a few years she lost her pedestal, as Elizabeth Hitchener did in the corresponding case of Shelley. On October 23, 1802, Lamb, writing to Coleridge, remarks indignantly that

Mrs. Barbauld's stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery. . . Knowledge insignificant and vapid as Mrs. B.'s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape of knowledge*; and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learnt that a horse is an animal, and Billy is better

than a horse, and such like; instead of that beautiful interest in wild tales, which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child. Science has succeeded to poetry no less in the little walks of children than with men. Is there no possibility of averting this sore evil? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with tales and old wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history!

Hang them!—I mean the cursed Barbauld crew, those blights and blasts of all that is human in man and child.

It was thirty-three years after the writing of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* when Coleridge's nephew heard his uncle's account of Mrs. Barbauld's criticism. Frankly, I think that Coleridge was chaffing her, as he chaffed John Pinkerton, the Scottish historian and antiquary, when the poet dined beside him at Mrs. Barbauld's and echoed his dispraise of the anonymously published *Lyrical Ballads*, and especially of *The Ancient Mariner*. Coleridge knew his Mrs. Barbauld (who, thought Hazlitt, "strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy") and his private impatience with the second of her opinions may have led him to disparage lightly (as Professor Lowes and certain other critics disparage rather heavily) the moral quality of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. That moral quality, as Hugh Fausset has shown, is

no mere miracle of inventive fantasy, but an involuntary but inevitable projection into imagery of his own inner discord. The Mariner's sin against Nature in shooting the Albatross imaged his own morbid divorce from the physical; and the poem was therefore moral in its essence, in its implicit recognition of creative values and of the spiritual death which dogs their frustration.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hugh I'Anson Fausset: *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, p. 166.

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In any case, the spiritual truth of the poem resides less in the two explicit stanzas<sup>2</sup> with which, save two, it concludes (stanzas whose social humanity seems to me to save them completely from the reproach that moral tags deserve) than in the implicit allegory attaching to the parallel sets of symbols consisting of the Sun and the Moon, the Polar Spirit and the Hermit, the First Voice and the Second Voice. For Mrs. Barbauld, says Professor Lowes,

even in the Mariner's valedictory piety, which does, I fear, warrant Coleridge's (and our own) regret, the moral sentiment was not obtruded openly enough. Had the Mariner shot a shipmate instead of an albatross, she would have understood—and there would have been no *Ancient Mariner*. . . . A tale the inalienable charm of which (as Coleridge himself perceived) lies in its kinship with the immortal fictions of *The Arabian Nights*, becomes, so motivated, a grotesque and unintelligible caricature of tragedy.<sup>3</sup>

Now although Professor Lowes is altogether right in thus preferring bird to man as the victim of the Mariner's crossbow, he appears to attach too much importance to the concrete symbol here, despite his convincing explorations of the psychological history of the Albatross within the poet's mind. The prime value of the incident is to make manifest the Mariner's spiritual sickness and his need of redemption. The destruction of the Albatross, indeed, is less a needless crime than a revealed diathesis. The central and critical symbols are those named above.

My thesis is, briefly (and this is but a brief paper), that the Ancient Mariner—who is at once himself, Coleridge and

<sup>2</sup>"The gentle moral of *The Ancient Mariner*, which comes at the end of that far flight of the imagination like the settling of a bird into the nest, has its near counterpart in the close of *Peter Bell*."—Walter Raleigh: *Wordsworth*, p. 77.

Curiously enough, even Mr. Fausset regrets the "explicit moral".

<sup>3</sup>John Livingston Lowes: *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 303.

all humanity—having sinned, both incurs punishment and seeks redemption; or, in other words, becomes anxiously aware of his relation to the God of Law (as symbolized by the Sun), and in his sub-consciousness earnestly entreats the forgiveness of the God of Love (represented by the Moon-symbol)—if haply such Love exists with power to succour the sinful soul.

The Sun and the Moon<sup>4</sup> always had an extraordinary fascination for Coleridge. As is well known, he pondered long the writing of a series of six Hymns to the Sun, the Moon and the Elements. "It is a mournful fact," says Professor Lowes,

that after all this 'mighty fret' the only one of the six which, even in title, ever took form,—the *Hymn to the Earth*—is a free translation, unacknowledged, of Stolberg's *Hymne an die Erde*.<sup>5</sup>

In the fourteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge refers to conversations between Wordsworth and himself touching "the sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset diffused over a known and familiar landscape. . . These are the poetry of nature." In his own poetry we find him singing of the fires of the Sun, in *Absence*; of "those broken clouds, his stormy train" in *To a Friend*; of "the burning Sun" in *Remorse* and in *Religious Musings*; of "the glorious Sun" in *Fears in Solitude*; of

The Angel of the Earth, who, while he guides  
His chariot-planet round the goal of day,  
All trembling gazes on the eye of God,

in *Ode to Georgiana*; and, in his translation of Schiller's *Piccolomini*, of "a house doomed in fire to perish":

Many a dark heaven drives his clouds together,  
Yea, shoots his lightnings down from sunny heights . . .

The *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni* is a great Hymn of awe and adoration; and in *The Destiny of Nations* there is a highly significant passage:

<sup>5</sup>Lowes, *op. cit.*, p. 483.      <sup>4</sup>*Cf.* Baal and Ashtoreth of the Phoenicians.

For what is freedom, but the unfettered use  
 Of all the powers which God for use had given?  
 But chiefly this, him first, him last, to view  
 Through meaner powers and secondary things  
 Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze.  
 For all that meets the bodily sense I deem  
 Symbolical, one mighty alphabet  
 For infant minds; and we in this low world  
 Placed with our backs to bright reality,  
 That we may learn with young unwounded ken  
 The substance from its shadow. Infinite Love,  
 Whose latence is the plenitude of all,  
 Though with retracted beams, and self-eclipse  
 Veiling, revealest thine eternal Sun.

What Coleridge has to say about the Kantian philosophy (in *Biographia Literaria*) he would regard also as true for the poetic imagination:

An *idea*, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol; and, except in geometry, all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction.<sup>6</sup>

And again:

In every work of art there is a reconciliation of the external with the internal; the conscious is so impressed on the unconscious as to appear in it. . . . He who combines the two is the man of genius; and for that reason he must partake of both.<sup>7</sup>

And still again:

The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and with our judgement *perdue* behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only, not to *disbelieve*.<sup>8</sup>

No wonder that Coleridge, in conceiving possible symbolic functions for the Sun, even troubled himself about the gender

<sup>6</sup>Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*, edited by J. Shawcross, Vol. I, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 258.      <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 189.



of the word in German. In *Table Talk* he concludes his discussion as follows:

To the best of my recollection, the Minnesingers and all the old poets always use the sun as masculine. . . . I must acknowledge my doubts whether . . . it can be shown that there ever was a nation that considered the sun in itself, and apart from language, as the feminine power. The moon does not so clearly demand a feminine as the sun does a masculine sex: it might be considered negatively or neuter;—yet, if the reception of its light from the sun were known, that would have been a good reason for making her feminine, as being the recipient body.

Among the most devoted hierophants of the Moon in English poetry one thinks of Blake, of Keats and of Coleridge. In *Absence* the Moon "relumes her lovely light"; in *An Autumnal Evening* she has a "silver lustre" and "a paly radiance"; the nightingale is apostrophized in the poem that bears his name as "minstrel to the moon". In Coleridge's fine sonnet *To the Autumnal Moon* she appears first as "mild splendour of the various-vested Night!" Christabel kneels in the moonlight to make her gentle vows;<sup>9</sup> in *Frost at Midnight* we see the

silent icicles  
Quietly shining to the quiet moon.

In *Dejection* the new Moon is winter-bright,

And overspread with phantom light,  
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread  
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread,)  
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling  
The coming on of rain and squally blast.

In *The Wanderings of Cain*—

Their road was through a forest of fir-trees; at its entrance the trees stood at distances from each other, and the path was broad, and the moonlight and the moonlight shadows reposed upon it, and appeared quietly to inhabit that solitude.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. A. C. Bradley: *A Miscellany*, p. 182.

*In Remorse—*

The many clouds, the sea, the rock, the sands,  
Lie in the silent moonshine.

Coleridge's keen interest in astrology is closely connected with this feeling for Sun and Moon. In his poetic work that interest is nowhere more eloquently expressed than in Thekla's account of her visit to the astrological tower (*The Piccolomini*, Act II, Scene iv) and in Wallenstein's remark to Seni in Act IV, Scene i. The former passage reads as follows:

It was a strange  
Sensation that came o'er me, when at first  
From the broad sunshine I stepped in: and now  
The narrowing line of daylight, that ran after  
The closing door, was gone; and all about me  
'Twas pale and dusky night, with many shadows  
Fantastically cast. Here six or seven  
Colossal statues, and all kings, stood round me  
In a half circle. Each one in his hand  
A sceptre bore, and on his head a star,  
And in the tower no other light was there  
But from these stars: all seemed to come from them.  
'These are the planets,' said that low old man,  
'They govern worldly fates, and for that cause  
Are imaged here as kings. That farthest from you,  
Spiteful and cold, an old man melancholy,  
With bent and yellow forehead, he is Saturn.  
He opposite, the king with the red light,  
An armed man for the battle, that is Mars:  
And both these bring but little luck to man.'  
But at his side a lovely lady stood,  
The star upon her head was soft and bright,  
And that was Venus, the bright star of joy.  
On the left hand, lo! Mercury with wings.  
Quite in the middle glittered silver-bright  
A cheerful man, and with a monarch's mien;  
And this was Jupiter, my father's star:  
And at his side I saw the Sun and Moon.

The second passage runs:

And sun and moon, too, in the sextile aspect,  
The soft heart with the veh'ment—so I love it.

I have gone directly to Coleridge's poems for evidence, first, of the interest itself; and, second, of his habitual imagi-

native reactions to solar and lunar aspects and dualisms. Professor Lowes has put us all in his debt by the immense industry and lively sympathy with which he has read and re-read so much of Coleridge's own reading in Bartram, Purchas, Bourzes, Cook, Dampier, Falconer, Martens, de Veer, Leemius, Shelvocke, Crantz, Lewis, Burnet, Edwards and others. No analysis of sources could be more thorough, no tracing of associations more careful and convincing; and yet the total impression left by this huge labour is one not at all of futility, but of incompleteness. For Professor Lowes, while he has disclosed a Coleridge of amazing intellectual grasp (whose reach indeed, because of its very intensity as well as because of his constitutional indolence and his addiction to narcotics, often seems to make the moment of grasp not worth while), stops short on the border line of purely imaginative experience. In his long study of *The Ancient Mariner*, he seems to miss the essential allegory. His details are abundant, perhaps even superabundant; his admiration of the author of this poem, of *Christabel* and of *Kubla Khan*, is hardly "on this side idolatry", yet, when all is said, his unsparable book is content to be a review of Coleridge's intellectual and creative relation to his available sources in books, in conversations and in his life history, not (save on occasion as supplying a casual argument) to articulate part with part in the poetic intention as a whole. To be sure, there are two excellent chapters on "The Courts of the Sun" and "The Journeying Moon"; and in "The Magical Synthesis" Professor Lowes insists that "Sun, Moon, Air, Fire and Water—no longer hid in a mist of Godwinian and Berkeleyian speculations, but in visible, tangible, trenchantly concrete reality—weave the very fabric of the poem";<sup>10</sup> and again in "The Journeying Moon" he writes that "the passage of the journeying moon through the sojourning yet ever onward moving stars owed the most deeply spiritual element

<sup>10</sup>Lowes, *op. cit.*, p. 76.



of its beauty to the influence of remembered imagery present only to Coleridge's inward eye."<sup>11</sup>

But passages like these do not go far enough. Their associative truth may be admitted, but if they are intended to aim at that controlling and enveloping truth of which they themselves are merely parts, they require expansion—an expansion which, it must be confessed, may go wrong much more easily than a study of the poet's selective and manipulative use of his source-material. Professor Lowes calls *The Road to Xanadu* "a study in the ways of the Imagination". It is that, if "ways" be limited to choice and combination, but it is hardly that if "ways" be meant to include subjective intention as well as objective patterning. I cannot help feeling that some effort should have been made—at whatever risk—eventually to reach and maintain the level of that intention.

Professor Lowes, however, seems both contented and discontented with the limits within which he elects to remain. In his thirteenth chapter he writes:

The incommunicable beauty of *The Ancient Mariner* is probably not enhanced one whit for anybody by a single line which I have written in this chapter. I am neither so ingenuous nor so pedantic as to cherish that particular illusion. The spell of beauty in the poem is sovereign in its exercise, and apt to pour on rashly proffered aid its beautiful disdain, and I have had another aim. For the ways of the spirit which creates the spell challenge the arduous effort to *understand*, by virtue of that very beauty in the thing created which exalts the faculty that gives it birth. And if that faculty be supreme, as we with one accord proclaim it is, then no attempt to fathom its workings is labour wholly lost—unless, indeed, we have recourse, as a last shift, to the miraculous, and relegate the plastic spirit of imagination to the category of the thaumaturgic and occult.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 240.

The poem is declared, as Coleridge himself declared it, to be "a work of pure imagination".

If we are rifling the urns where the dead bones of fact have long quietly rested, it is because the unquenchable spirit which gives beauty for ashes is there not wholly past finding out.<sup>13</sup>

Yet in the succeeding chapter Professor Lowes is discussing Coleridge's interest in animal magnetism and ocular hypnosis.

The Mariner is no more a mesmerist than he is the Wandering Jew. Yet though neither, he partakes, through the alchemy of genius, of the attributes of both. And in the eye that holds spell-bound one of three, another of those strange 'facts of mind' which were Coleridge's darling studies has lent to a denizen of the borderland between two worlds that 'credibilizing effect' which secures for these shadows of imagination our willing suspension of disbelief.<sup>14</sup>

There is nowhere here or elsewhere in the book a hint of the history behind the Mariner's glittering eye, a suggestion of the poet's bold transfer of the glitter in the dead seamen's eyes (Death) to those of the Mariner (Life-in-Death). The poet introduces the Mariner abruptly and repetitively as one with a glittering eye. A similar emphasis is given to the epithet *bright-eyed* (as in the penultimate stanza of Part VII); and when the fearful question, "Why look'st thou so?", is asked, our thoughts revert to that sinister glitter. Now consider this stanza in Part III:

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,  
Too quick for groan or sigh,  
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,  
And cursed me with his eye,

and these stanzas also from Part IV:

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot nor reek did they:  
The look with which they looked on me  
Had never passed away.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 241.    <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 254.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell  
 A spirit from on high;  
 But oh! more horrible than that  
 Is a curse in a dead man's eye!  
 Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
 And yet I could not die;

and these again from Part VI:

All stood together on the deck,  
 For a charnel-dungeon fitter:  
 All fixed on me their story eyes,  
 That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
 Had never passed away:  
 I could not draw my eyes from theirs  
 Nor turn them up to pray.

All that Professor Lowes says about the glittering eye is true, but it inadequately vindicates Coleridge's unerring choice of the adjective as expressing that uncanny communication of quality between the dead and the quick.

But to return to my thesis—that the Sun (with the Polar Spirit and the First Voice) is conceived in Coleridge's imagination as suggesting the stern, just, masculine, punitive side of the nature of God; and that the Moon (with the Hermit and the Second Voice) normally symbolizes the gentle, feminine, redemptive side. The whole ballad presents a tale of sin and salvation, of crime and compassion, of the operation of inflexible Law and the intervention of inexhaustible Love.

The passages quoted above from Coleridge's own works, considered cumulatively, seem to reinforce this interpretation of the symbols we are considering. In the poem itself it will be noticed that there are eleven references to the Sun and fourteen to the Moon, and that these are the chief recurrent symbols. In the first edition there are ten references to the Sun and fifteen to the Moon. The total number of references to Sun and Moon in the editions of 1798 and of 1817 is, however, the same—namely, twenty-five. None of these appears in Part VII in either version, and this, as we shall see, for a reason.

In the pictures of the Sun he appears first as the ship drives southward across the Equator—the Sun coming up upon the left, shining bright, and setting on the right. "The vertical sun," as Professor Lowes explains, "stands over the mast for an instant at noon, to mark the crossing of the Line." After the vessel rounds Cape Horn the positions of sunrise and sunset are reversed. Both passages are temporal and positional in content, Saxon and almost monosyllabic in diction. God is present and omnipresent.

The third reference is more significant. After the wanton slaughter of the Albatross,

Nor dim nor red, like *God's own head*,  
The glorious Sun uprist.

The majesty of the Divine slowly and steadily reveals itself until the Sun has climbed to the meridian. Then there appears one of the most impressively symbolic stanzas in the poem:

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

The avenging process has begun; the ship is suddenly becalmed; the Polar Spirit plagues the sailors; the dead Albatross is hung about the Mariner's neck; weary and menacing days dawn and die; the crew are suffering from drought and fear; when at last the phantom vessel is descried:

See! See! (I cried) she tacks no more!  
Hither to work us weal,—  
Without a breeze, without a tide,  
She steadies with upright keel!

The western wave was all aflame,  
The day was well nigh done!  
Almost upon the western wave  
Rested the broad bright sun;  
When that strange shape drove suddenly  
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,  
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)

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As if through a dungeon-grate he peered  
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)  
How fast she nears and nears!  
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,  
Like restless gossameres?

Are those her ribs through which the Sun  
Did peer, as through a grate?  
And is that Woman all her crew?  
Is that a Death? and are there two?  
Is Death that woman's mate?

Guilt and Fear have interposed themselves between God and the sinful Mariner and his mates, who find themselves now wholly in the power of Death and of Life-in-Death. The crew become the prey of Death,<sup>15</sup> while the Mariner falls to the lot of Life-in-Death. She whistles thrice, and at that sinister signal the sense of the Divine presence is wholly lost:

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:  
At one stride comes the dark;  
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,  
Off shot the spectre-bark.

One after one, under "the star-dogged Moon" (distorted symbol, for the moment, of an alienated Love), the sailors perish, and the Mariner is abandoned to the horror of utter separation from his Creator. By his own act he has become a castaway. No saint takes pity on his soul in agony. Like Claudius and Macbeth, he seeks to pray and fails to pray. Divorced altogether from hope or help, for seven days and seven nights he

<sup>15</sup>Professor Lane Cooper, in his trenchant paper, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Mr. Lowes* (P. M. L. A., Vol. XLIII, No. 2), offers this objection: "For agreeing after the fact that it was good to slay the bird, they suffer excruciating tortures, and die in misery. Is their credulous mistake an adequate tragic *hamartia*? Dream or no dream, the situation is revolting." Perhaps Professor Cooper has not sufficiently considered (1) that the Mariner's punishment is much more severe than that suffered by his comrades; (2) that the allegory requires his isolation; (3) that Wordsworth (whose 'Aristotelian' criticism of the poem Professor Cooper approves and who suggested, as the same paper notes, "the reanimation of the dead bodies by souls, presumably angelic") must himself have approved, at least tacitly, the plan Coleridge follows. As Fausset remarks, in controverting Wordsworth's well-known strictures, the poem has "its own higher logic".



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watches the curse in the dead men's eyes, and yet, like the Wandering Jew, he himself cannot die. As he declares to the Wedding-Guest in Part VII:

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide, wide sea:  
So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
Scarce seeméd there to be.

All is foul and fixed, as though for ever. Suddenly in this static horror of despair something moves,—the only moving, hope-renewing object within that wilderness of sea and sky. It is the normal, familiar Moon—symbol, as we have seen, of the inexhaustible loving-kindness of God. No contrast could be greater than that between the misery of the Mariner in his ominous surroundings and the gentle rising of the friendly Moon. Rossetti was always eloquent in his praise of the first stanza of Part V:

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,  
Beloved from pole to pole!  
To Mary Queen the praise be given!  
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,  
That slid into my soul.

But it is hard to find in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* more beautiful lines than the following, especially as related to their context:

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
And nowhere did abide:  
Softly she was going up,  
And a star or two beside—

Note the word *softly* and note its reappearance when the poet describes the Second Voice:

The other was a *softer* voice,  
As *soft* as honey-dew:

But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
Thy *soft* response renewing—

The moonbeams, says Coleridge,

. . . bemocked the sultry main,  
Like April hoar-frost spread;  
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
The charmed water burnt alway  
A still and awful red.

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That is, all is now bathed in moonlight save the shadow of the ship. The Mariner looks beyond the shadow, and *for the first time sees from the point of view of the God of Love* those sea-creatures whom he had previously despised and condemned as "a thousand, thousand slimy things". Beheld in this moonlight aspect, they reveal unsuspected grace and charm:

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware;  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.

Seen thus from the higher point of view, the Mariner sees them thus thereafter, even within the shadow of the ship. "The spell," says the gloss, "begins to break."

Corresponding to the transfiguration of the water-snakes comes soon afterwards, in Part V, another change. The souls of the Mariner's companions "that fled in pain" are replaced by "a troop of spirits blest". The sounds of their singing are sustained with an exquisite sweetness, and they renew that sweetness by darting to their source in the Sun. But there is another spirit who does not sing. "The lonesome Spirit from the south-pole," says the gloss, "carries on the ship as far as the Line, in obedience to the angelic troop, but still requireth vengeance." The Polar Spirit and the Sun are at one in this, for, as the poet immediately declares:

The Sun, right up above the mast,  
Had fixed her to the ocean:  
But in a minute she 'gan stir,  
With a short uneasy motion—  
Backwards and forwards half her length  
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,  
She made a sudden bound:  
It flung the blood into my head,  
And I fell down in a swoond.

How long in that same fit I lay,  
 I have not to declare;  
 But ere my living life returned,  
 I heard, and in my soul discerned,  
 Two voices in the air.

The two voices, let it be repeated, simply vary the symbols of Law and of Love, of Retribution and of Redemption. The First Voice relates the story of the crime, and shows full kinship and stern sympathy with the wrongs of the Polar Spirit. The Second Voice pleads gently that the Mariner

hath penance done,  
 And penance more will do.

The Second Voice also reveals the power of the prime corresponding symbol, the Moon:

Still as a slave before his lord,  
 The ocean hath no blast;  
 His great bright eye most silently  
 Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;  
 For she guides him smooth or grim.  
 See brother, see! how graciously  
 She looketh down on him.

The voices fade away; the Mariner awakens; the Moon is high; the dead men stand on deck with that eerie punitive glitter in their eyes, the spell of which the Mariner, even when redeemed, can never wholly forget. But for the moment the spell is snapped, and the Mariner views the ocean, no longer as slimy, or rotting, or painted, but as fresh and clear and green. "The curse," says the gloss, "is finally expiated." The two motives of Retribution and Redemption are drawing together and a great wind bears the ship towards her haven.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek  
 Like a meadow-gale of spring—

Dread expresses itself in the next line:

It mingled strangely with my fears,  
 and hope in the fourth line:

Yet it felt like a welcoming.

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The almost magical manner in which the poet combines these opposing motives here and in the next stanza deserves especial attention. Dread appears in

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,

and hope in the reappearance of the familiar reassuring word *softly*:

Yet she sailed softly too.

Hope is augmented in the line:

Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—

But lingering dread lifts itself again in the melancholy reflection:

On me alone it blew.

The Mariner prays (for he has learned long since to pray)<sup>16</sup> that his incredible homecoming may not be as the vision of a dream. "He beholdeth," says the gloss, "his native country." And he loves it as never before, not only for the welcoming that its familiar landmarks offer his heart, but also because the Moon still accompanies him, steeping in calm and silentness the bay, the rock, the kirk, the steady weathercock. He had not heeded the white moonshine that glimmered through night and fog when he slew the Albatross; but now he knows the meaning of the Moon—the eternal Love of God—and he turns to the Hermit for confession and absolution. Confession made, he is duly shriven, but, says Coleridge in the gloss, with penetrating intention: "The penance of life falls on him. And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land. And to teach by his own example love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth."

Professor Lowes, in his fifteenth chapter, "Wefts and Spectres", several times appears to recognize that there is in the poem some such contrast as this paper has tried to indicate, but he pauses always on the threshold of allegorical intention

<sup>16</sup>*Cf.* lines 244-7, 288, 469, 605-617.

and interpretation, satisfying himself with the statement that "in the first half of the poem the agency of an avenging daemon is in the ascendant; in the second, the prevailing power of an angel band."<sup>17</sup> It does not greatly help us to learn from him in his next chapter that "the bloody sun stands right up above the mast in a hot and copper sky, not for its own sake as a lucidly exact delineation of a galaxy of images, but as a great sea-mark in the controlling outline of the voyage,"<sup>18</sup> since his elucidation of the Sun-symbol really goes no farther; nor that "the moon in *The Ancient Mariner*, like the sun, is more than a luminary in the sky," as he says in the chapter on "The Journeying Moon". We must accept these statements and be grateful for the wealth of research that validate and confirm them and a thousand others, yet for myself I cannot but feel the imaginative necessity of reconstructing the allegory in terms of more definite spiritual meaning and inner harmony. As Lamb told Southey, there are "fifty passages as miraculous as the miracles they celebrate."<sup>19</sup> I am aware of the dangers that beset any effort at the interpretation of allegory. "Truth is this to me and that to thee." And yet, with the great examples of Bridges and Colvin in their respective interpretations of *Endymion*, and of many another patient believer in the right of great poetry to be understood and appreciated in its largest and its subtlest values alike, it has seemed worth while to offer this contribution.

It should be added, in conclusion, that the resolved dualism of Part VII does not require the final presence of either Sun or Moon, since both of the Divine functions which these two respectively represent have been harmonized as necessary and interdependent. This persistent dualism, monistically resolved, is of the very bones and blood of the ballad as a whole. The major symbols, Sun and Moon, First Voice and Second

<sup>17</sup>Lowes, *op. cit.* p. 294.      <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>19</sup>Lamb's Letter to Robert Southey, Nov. 8, 1798.



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Voice, Polar Spirit and Hermit, and the chief supporting symbols (not considered here)—the unselected Wedding-Guests and the one of three, the Albatross and the skylark, the ship and the home country, the corpses and the seraphs, and the reluctantly listening Wedding-Guest of Part I as against the sadder and wiser man of Part VII who "turned from the bridegroom's door"—these constitute an imaginative harmony, a parabolic wholeness that we dare not ignore, for the poet does for all humanity what the Mariner does for the Wedding-Guest. He speaks to the idealist in each of us, and makes us poets too.